In his engaging paper Ishay Rosen-Zvi raises a fascinating question as to the origin of the rabbis’ critical view of Jeremiah and their silence on various Jeremianic themes. He argues that the rabbis’ “pointed criticism” of the figure of Jeremiah and their concomitant failure to utilize the book of Jeremiah “to decode their own time, though this may seem like the most obvious use of the book,”¹ are primarily the result of a rabbinic aversion to “Jeremiah’s theology of doom” and “his uncompromising admonitions.”² Rosen-Zvi’s argument grabs the imagination, especially through his discussion of the graphic and conflicted text from Pesiq. Rab. 26, which he offers for illustrative purposes: here Jeremiah the priest paradoxically offers the water of the sotah ritual to his own “mother.” In this brief response I submit some questions in an attempt to test and potentially help refine Rosen-Zvi’s argument.

Rosen-Zvi identifies six Jeremianic themes that are “ignored” by the rabbis—spiritual worship at the expense of sacrifices and the temple, a new covenant, universalism, submission to a foreign conquering power, living in foreign land, and a belligerent eschatology. For the “new covenant” theme, Rosen-Zvi perceptively asks, “Could this ignoring be a reaction to the adoption of the ‘New Testament’ in the New Testament…?”³ Tacitly, then, he seems to accept that the rabbis’ aversion to Jeremiah’s vituperative stance towards Judah is not the sole reason for the rabbis’ reluctance to use the term “new covenant” to interpret the experiences of their own community.

Following Rosen-Zvi’s own lead, questions in a similar vein could profitably be asked of some other neglected Jeremianic themes. Do the rabbis fail to take up Jeremiah’s insistence on the efficacy of spiritual worship over sacrifices in the temple as a reaction, even if only in part, to Christian appropriation of the theme? Rosen-Zvi notes the use of Jer 7:11 in Jesus’ criticism of the mismanage-

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¹ Ishay Rosen-Zvi, “Like a Priest Exposing His Own Wayward Mother: Jeremiah in Rabbinic Literature,” in this volume, 583.
² Ibid., 584.
³ Ibid., 581.
ment of the temple system, as related in Mark 11:17 and parallels. How much of a role did this and related criticisms of the temple play in subsequent Christian literature? To what extent might competition with Christian interpretive communities have informed the rabbis’ avoidance of Jeremiah on this point?

Similarly, how much of an impact did the Christian appropriation of the theme of universalism in Jeremiah and Isaiah have on the rabbis, who “turned a blind eye” to the notion? Universalism became a hallmark of the Christian communities early on and continued to be characteristic of the movement. How might competition of interpretive approaches have influenced the rabbinic aversion to using Jeremiah in this regard?

Aside from competition with other interpretive communities, one may ask whether the memory of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the continued absence of such a sacred space had an influence on rabbinic aversion to the Jeremianic criticism of the temple. Rosen-Zvi seems to hint at this possibility. The question of the ways in which the year 70 C.E. was a watershed is, as studies over the past decades have shown, multifaceted and resists simplification. The difficulty in answering the question is due in large part to the limitations of the evidence. Martin Goodman presents a strong case for the loss of the colossal religious site in Jerusalem having a continuing influence on Jewish identity throughout the Roman Empire. One factor was a one-time event with far-reaching and long-term social implications: the atypical triumphal procession in Rome, in which objects from the Jerusalem temple were put on display. Two other factors were ongoing. The first was a yearly tax imposed by Vespasian on all Jews in the empire, including women and children, that took the place of the Jewish temple tax and was dedicated to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. The second was the prohibition against rebuilding the Jerusalem temple—an uncharacteristic and “outrageous” approach to the religious sentiments of people groups subjected to Roman rule. Bar Kokhba’s

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4 See the contributions in Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss, eds., On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 78; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

5 Not only was it “not standard Roman practice to glory in the destruction of enemy temples,” but also it was common for foreign gods to be incorporated into the Roman pantheon; cf. Martin Goodman, Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 452. The peculiar triumphal procession following the capture of Jerusalem was then engraved into public conscience by the remodeling of the center of Rome “to reflect the victory, with two triumphal arches dominating the traditional route of all triumphal processions,” ibid., 453. Among the relief sculptures, Jewish religious objects were depicted as prominent booty.

6 Goodman, Rome and Jerusalem, 454, 464.